

# What is the use of interculturality? Evaluation of the Intercultural University of Chiapas by its students

## *¿De que me sirve la interculturalidad? Evaluacion de la Universidad Intercultural de Chiapas por sus estudiantes*

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### Abstract

The intercultural model in higher education in Mexico has so far been the only proposal made a reality for an inclusive education towards the "non-western" knowledge integrated in an official-state educational curriculum. However, this model has so far received much criticism from different academic fields, although information on the views of students of intercultural universities is limited. This article explores the opinions of the student population of the Intercultural University of Chiapas (Mexico) on the intercultural model, their motivations to enter this university and the practical applicability of their studies. With a use of quantitative methods it concludes that there are ethnic differences in the evaluation of the intercultural model and the motivations to study in the intercultural university. It is also shown that the level of skepticism expressed by students about this model and the differ-

ent forms of its practical applicability is related to the amount of time that the student has spent studying in the university. Based on these data it is proposed to review some critical points to improve the functioning of intercultural universities.

**Keywords:** Interculturality, multiculturalism, intercultural higher education, students, Intercultural University of Chiapas.

### Resumen

El modelo intercultural en la educación superior en México hasta el momento ha sido la única propuesta hecha realidad para una educación inclusiva hacía los conocimientos y saberes "no occidentales", integrados en un currículo educativo oficial-estatal. No obstante, este modelo hasta ahora ha recibido muchas críticas desde distintos campos académicos, aunque la información sobre los puntos de vista de los estudiantes de

las universidades interculturales es limitada. El objetivo del presente artículo es explorar las opiniones de la población estudiantil de la Universidad Intercultural de Chiapas (México) sobre el modelo intercultural, sus motivaciones de entrar en esta universidad y la aplicabilidad práctica de sus estudios. Esto con el fin de conocer algunos aspectos funcionales de este modelo de educación y su valoración “desde abajo”, por parte de las y los estudiantes. Utilizando metodología cuantitativa se concluye que existen diferencias étnicas en la evaluación del modelo intercultural y las motivaciones de cursar

en la universidad intercultural. Además se muestra que el nivel de escepticismo expresado por los estudiantes sobre dicho modelo y las distintas formas de su aplicabilidad práctica está relacionado con la cantidad de tiempo que el alumno ha pasado estudiando en la universidad. Basándose en estos datos se propone revisar algunos puntos críticos para mejorar el funcionamiento de las universidades interculturales.

**Descriptores:** Interculturalidad, multiculturalidad, educación superior intercultural, estudiantes, Universidad Intercultural de Chiapas.

## 1. Introduction

The introduction of interculturalism in the public policies of the Mexican government in the field of higher education is an important shift towards educational and cultural inclusion that was still unlikely two decades ago, although just as necessary as it is today. Inequality in access to higher education in Mexico is well documented and what stands out in practically all studies in this regard is the situation of exclusion that young Mexicans are experiencing (Bertely Busquets, 2011; Casillas Alvarado et al. ., 2012, Chávez, 2008, Gallart Nocetti and Henríquez Bremer, 2006). The reasons why there is such exclusion are several, but the main ones continue to be the socioeconomic marginalization of that population sector, the anti-ethnic discrimination and the geographical distribution of the universities that are usually located in the cities, quite far from the numerous rural communities.

Largely thanks to the mobilizations and movements of the ethnic groups, intercultural higher education was implemented at the state level in the 21st century (Dietz and Cortés, 2011). In this model of education, interculturality implies a comprehensive communication between the different cultures that coexist in the same space, with the goal of encouraging mutual enrichment, recognition and appreciation of each of them within the framework of equality (Hidalgo Hernández, 2005, p.78). In Mexico, as in some other Latin American countries, this

interaction model has been implemented institutionally in the Intercultural Universities (IU) that are multi-ethnic and in their educational contents try to integrate both the “modern-scientific” knowledge, as well as the “Traditional”, typical of ethnic groups. There comes the permanent debate if this model is functional in the sense of being fulfilling its goals and in what way.

The learning process always involves an exchange of knowledge and ideas, between not only teachers and students in the classroom, but also among students. Considering that interculturality is a polysemic concept and, simultaneously, a practice in constant construction, it is essential to question how it is perceived, valued and practiced by the students of the IU, because these young people are being professionally prepared within an educational model where interculturality is the ideological basis. This is where the main objective of this study comes from: analyzing the opinions of the active students of the Intercultural University of Chiapas (IUCH) on the intercultural model and describing how they evaluate the practical applicability of what they have learned, both in the labor market and in their daily lives.

### 1.1. Multiculturalism and interculturality: new concepts for old processes?

As explanatory paradigms, both multiculturalism and interculturality are used to understand, explain and “manage” diversity and cultural plu-



alism. Both concepts arise in the societies of Western Europe and the United States, achieving a great analytical development with the emergence of migration as a large-scale social phenomenon and the consequent debate about the inclusion of ethnic minorities in national territories.

The key concept in multiculturalism is tolerance as an ethical virtue of *the public*: the ability and willingness to respect differences and not to place one's beliefs as an absolute condition of coexistence with others. However, here we can distinguish two modes of tolerance: the negative and the positive. The first refers to the ability to withstand the difference so that it is tolerated but not shared. Positive tolerance, on the other hand, consists in trying to place oneself in the place of the other in order to share their beliefs and valuations "from within" (Pérez Ruiz, 2014, pp. 100-101).

Unlike multiculturalism, interculturality appears as an analytical and multidimensional term to understand *interethnic* and / or cross-cultural relations. Instead of a cultural "fixed photo" management -like the fact that different cultures coexist in a society or country- interculturalism focuses on the relationship between cultures from the difference between them and, at the same time, starting from the principle of equality of cultures for positive interaction within diversity (Malgesini and Giménez, 2000, pp. 253-259).

During the 1990s, the transnational discourses of multiculturalism and interculturality migrated not only between the Anglo-Saxon countries and the Europeans of the continent, but between them and Latin America, which lived a "*post-indigenismo*" and post-colonialism, resulting in an own version of this concept. As observed by Pérez Ruiz (2014, pp. 102-105), instead of positive tolerance, Latin American interculturalism did not seek to establish measures that facilitate the assimilation of ethnic minorities, but aimed at changing the conditions and modalities in the relations and asymmetric exchanges occur. In this way, *the intercultural* in Latin America is discussed, resignified and appropriated under a "decolonial" perspective,

problematizing the historical processes of relations between colonizers and colonized, and the effects that have produced centuries of discrimination (Mato, 2014; Tirzo Gómez and Hernández, 2010, pp. 25-26).

Currently interculturality is approached from at least four fields of social thought: education, communication, intercultural mediation and from the sociopolitical field where interculturality appears as a societal ideal. Interculturality as a social utopia, the ideal type of communication and, at the same time, an institutionalized political program is shown most clearly in the field of education. Interculturality according to the statutes of the IU refers to mutual relations between different cultures and balanced mutual participation. Cultural exchange, according to its statutes, usually has a "controlled" trait because it seeks to avoid relations of domination-cultural imposition, favoring a symmetrical communication and exchange. However, how the institutionalized intercultural premise in the form of a societal ideal and, at the same time, a concrete policy is carried out in real life, unfortunately, is a subject full of internal problems and contradictions.

## 1.2 The achievements and the contradictions of Intercultural Higher Education

One of the main objectives of the IUs is to create students committed to the development of their towns and their regions. At the center of the institution is research on the cultures and languages of the people it serves. Teaching, research and links with communities must be respected and all teachers and students must participate in the three areas (Sartorello, 2016). There comes several IU achievements come as (1) improvement of the possibilities for young people from ethnic groups to access higher education; (2) greater geographical distribution of the universities; (3) the integration of different types of knowledge and modes of knowledge production; (4) valorization and vindication of the languages and



knowledge of the ethnic groups; (5) the development of teaching and research guided by criteria of appreciation of cultural diversity; (6) generation of specific “local development” projects and (7) training of graduates from the communities they intend to serve (Casillas Muñoz, 2012; Mato, 2014). Lately, it has also been discussed whether intercultural education can contribute directly to the creation of an “intercultural capital” as a particular form of the cultural capital of the person (Pöllmann, 2014). If the forms of cultural capital exist “in relation to” and “through” different cultures<sup>1</sup>, then in an increasingly “connected” and interdependent world the “intercultural capital” is emerging as a human quality with great sociocultural importance<sup>2</sup>, all in countries as culturally diverse as Mexico.

Despite certain achievements and the enormous potential of intercultural education in the improvement of “cultural dialogue”, the current state of the implementation of this model has caused strong criticisms, both administrative and practical, as well as theoretical and epistemological. In addition to the economic problems, there are certain administrative-educational problems of the IU in the form of accreditations that derive from the intercultural premise of gathering “modern knowledge” and “traditional knowledge” in an institutional, state and bureaucratic context (Mato, 2014; Vargas Moreno, 2014). Therefore, in the IU it would not be appropriate to apply rigid systems of supposedly “universal” criteria of validity (thus, there is no “universal knowledge”), but rather “flexible” systems. Unfortunately, this “flexibility” is often misinterpreted as “low quality”.

To avoid segregation, the IUs are not considered exclusive for those from ethnic groups, but are open to students of any group and sociocultural affiliation. At the same time, the presence of young people of the ethnic groups is emphasized, as well as the “community” and “rurality” as the main topics of the research projects in the careers offered by the IU. This point is still somewhat confusing, since in the

common imaginary the IU becomes “indigenous universities”. It is enough to observe how many IUs in Mexico and Latin America carry in their name the word “indigenous” or of any particular ethnic group. Therefore, this demonstration of “ethnic empowerment” turns out to be contradictory with the premise of avoiding ethnic separations and being open not exclusively to that sector of the population.

Continuing with the previous point, one can perceive a neo-indigenist thread in the functioning and premises of the IU (Kaltmeier, 2010). As the framework of educational policies are built without the participation of ethnic groups, nothing else becomes a “new simulated impositions” with discourses of respect for cultural diversity (Gómez Lara, 2011, Llanes Ortiz, 2008). The so-called “dialogue of knowledge” fails to hide the asymmetric character, nor the inherent conflictivity of such dialogue (Corona Berkin and Pérez Daniel, 2010, pp. 22-23, Sartorello, 2016). Knowledge can be complementary in peasant practice, every day, but often they are not easily subsumable or can be incorporated into canonical-scientific knowledge. At the same time, promoting a dialogue between knowledge and culture implies dichotomising again certain knowledge and cultures (indigenous-mestizo, rural-urban, etc.) and, again, facing obstacles to achieve a dialogue of heterogeneous knowledge (Dietz and Cortés, 2011, pp. 120-138). In this way, the current role of educational interculturality as a way of “decolonizing knowledge” turns out to be overvalued (Cuji Llugna, 2012). In addition to these epistemological problems, there are other internal problems, specific to the IU that have to do both with the contents of the intercultural offer, and communication within the institutions (Bastiani and Moguel Viveros, 2011)

In Mexico, the IUs are subject to political changes in the States where they are installed and, therefore, lack stability. Due to the recurrent changes is the institutional administrations, the continuity of the training of teachers and researchers is broken because the same academic



staff is not from the beginning for their constant mobility to other professional spaces. There are also internal disputes between “theorists” and “practitioners” or teachers who emphasize exclusively the theoretical side of interculturality and those who value only the practical dimension (Tipa and Zebadúa, 2014, pp. 38-39). In this regard, the usefulness of the projects has also been questioned, because, unlike the IU postulates, these do not usually correspond to the needs of the communities and the knowledge acquired in the IU is not useful for many students. Time of his involvement in daily life (Cruz Salazar and Moreno, 2013, Sartorello, 2016).

Another problem shared by the IU is the interpretation of the “intercultural approach” that varies among teachers. The analysis of the IU discourses on interculturality reveals that this is a polysemic concept, with multiple meanings, interpretations and definitions. Even its conceptualization can vary from one period to another and according to the different contexts and interests that are intended to achieve. In general, different dimensions or contexts can be distinguished where interculturality is used and problematized: in ontological, epistemological, educational, social, intra-cultural and political-institutional terms (Sandoval *et al.*, 2010).

Apparently, the achievements of the IU and the current model of intercultural higher education are not yet enough to be able to diminish and overshadow the problems and the substantial criticisms. Although the existence of these universities already could be considered as a great achievement, in this balance between achievements and criticism we can observe a very dangerous tendency: while the achievements tend to have more theoretical and abstract qualities, almost of the speculative level<sup>3</sup>, the criticisms are concrete and of daily level.

## 2. Methodology

To achieve the objective of this study - to describe and analyze the opinions of UNICH

students about the intercultural model and the applicability of their studies - an unusual method was chosen, a survey. This choice is due to several reasons. The first is the absence of quantitative methods when studying the student populations of intercultural universities, since in this type of approach the use of qualitative methodology almost always prevails, while quantitative instruments are more common in studies where the student populations of “conventional” universities. The second reason is to show again that the use of quantitative instruments always has the advantage of being able to describe opinions in a general way, that is, to capture “global” trends, which serves as a fruitful ground for new qualitative approaches. In short, the use of a quantitative instrument in this type of study is novel and necessary, taking into account that there is an explicit lack of more general data of a quantitative nature on the student populations of the IU.

The empirical basis for this study comes from a survey applied to the student population of UNICH, San Cristóbal de Las Casas. The survey was made based on a representative sample (n=204) stratified according to the maternal language of the person, sex and career studied at the university. These three elements to make the sample were chosen because of the availability of information that exists on the part of UNICH about their students. In addition, these elements serve as the focus when correlating and describing the data obtained. In the questionnaire, the young people were invited to express their opinion on interculturality as a model of higher education, their motivations to enter the UNICH and the practical utility of their studies. Subsequently, using descriptive statistics, frequency and contingency tables, these opinions were analyzed in the context of the ethnolinguistic belonging of the person, their sex and the career studied at the university. In the next sections will be





presented the most striking data that appeared in the results of the survey.

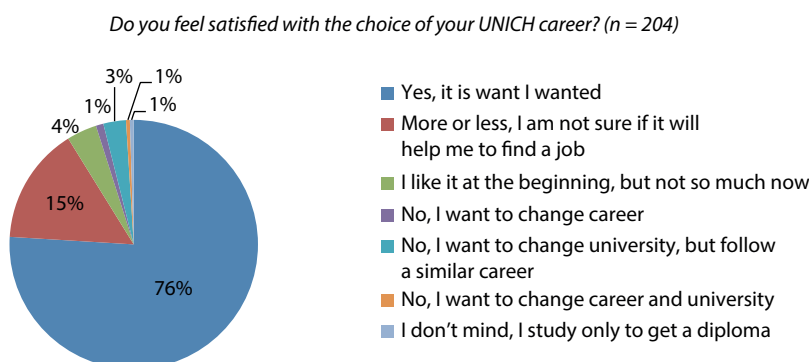
### 3. The evaluation of the educational offer and the intercultural model by the UNICH students

The UNICH as the second intercultural higher education institution in Mexico was founded on December 1, 2004 and open to students since August 2005. At this university six undergraduate majors, distributed among five academic units, can be studied. The main office (San Cristóbal de Las Casas) offers five careers and is the most numerous in terms of students, always counting with more than half of all students enrolled in the UNICH. In the January-June 2015 semester, the San Cristóbal de Las Casas campus had 1,088 students, of which 39% were native speakers of Spanish, while the remaining 61% were speakers of one of the regional languages of Chiapas (tsotsil, tseltal, ch'ol, zoque or some other). The distribution by sex was fairly balanced

with 49% women and 51% men. In 2015, the main office was offering five bachelor's degrees: "Medicine with an intercultural approach" (with 18% of students enrolled), "Alternative Tourism" (with 15% of students), "Sustainable Development" (with 18% of students), "Intercultural Communication" (with 14% of students) and "Language and Culture" (with 35% of students).

The overall satisfaction with the career that people attend at the UNICH presents a quite positive outlook, since three-quarters of the students affirm, "It is what they wanted" (Graph 1). Only 10% of the respondents expressed dissatisfaction, of which 5% did so explicitly, that is, wanting to change careers and / or the university. Also the reasons why young people have chosen the UNICH usually shows a positive landscape: a quarter of the students already wanted to study at this university before they entered, while the majority (43%) chose the UNICH after having known its educational offer (Graph 2). However, for 22% of the students the UNICH was the second option or the only university where they managed to enter.

Graph 1. Satisfaction about the choice of career at UNICH



Source: self-made

Although this data is striking, it would be very risky to make generalizations about the UNICH as a "second-class" university, since for most of the students the fact of not being able to enter another university was not the main reason for their election of the UNICH and there are no more data from

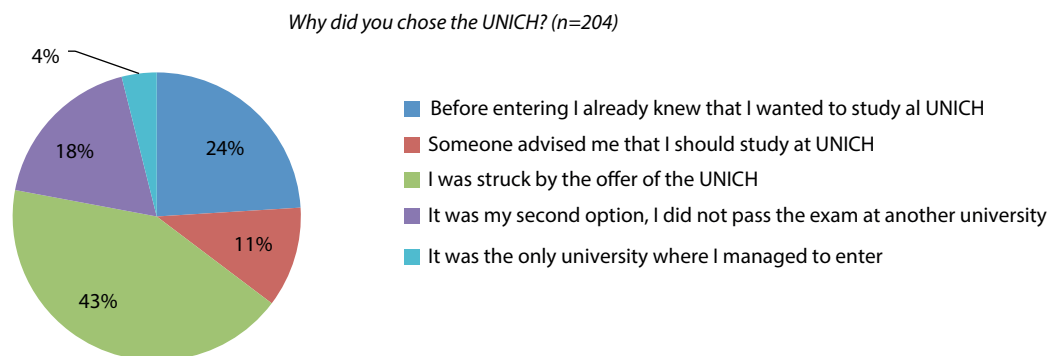
other universities with which you could compare the motivations of young people when choosing the university where to study. In addition, considering that the UNICH is still a "young" university, it is hardly surprising that most of the students chose in favor of it after having known their offer.



Higher education is often a strategy for upward social mobility and a more favorable insertion in the labor market. In this sense, more than half of the students (64%) express doubts about their studies at the UNICH as an element that

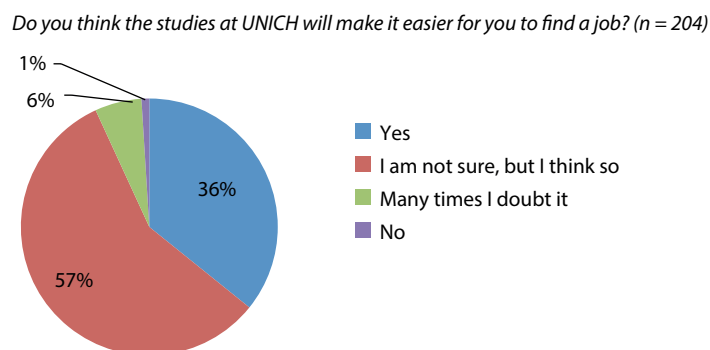
will help them find the job (Graph 3). This means that the university that is offering education as a certain type of capital in the *Bourdian* sense is not informing its students in an efficient way about the applicability of its offer in the labor market.

Graph 2. The reasons to choose the UNICH



Source: self-made

Graph 3. Evaluation of studies in the context of the labor market



Source: self-made

On the other hand, the majority of students (86%) affirm that what they have learned in UNICH will serve them in their daily lives (Graph 4). An apparent imbalance between the “utilitarian reward” and the “human reward” that exists in the students’ imaginary is a peculiar situation in the context of higher education. This leads to consider that, using the *Bourdieu* terminology, the so-called “intercultural capital” in general terms would be convertible to social capital than to economic capital. In a sense, this accords with the original humanist premise of

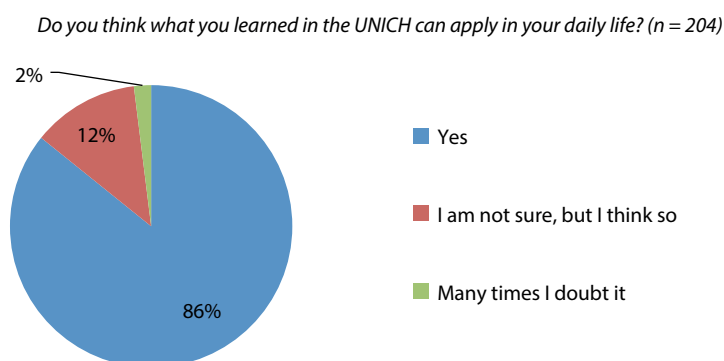
interculturality instead of being a commodifiable idea. Simultaneously, the foregoing indicates that future studies on the graduates of the IU and their work trajectories are indispensable.

These data are particularly striking when we see that for the majority of the UNICH student population (70%) the plans to finish college is just to find employment that has to do with their careers, while a quarter of the students want to continue with their studies. postgraduate studies (Graph 5). In other words, the motiva-



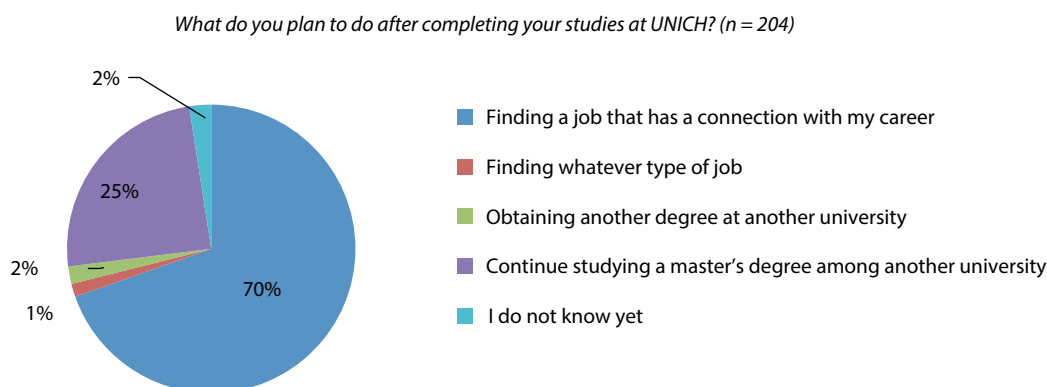
tion based on the merit of higher education is not secondary to these young people, although they are not sure if it is something that will be fulfilled when they finish their studies at UNICH.

Graph 4. Evaluation of studies in the daily context



Source: self-made

Graph 5. Plans after having finished the studies



Source: self-made

The general evaluation of the intercultural model implemented in the UNICH is quite positive, since 77% of the students think that the educational contents comply with this model, although a quarter of the young people do not agree with this statement in different degrees (Graph 6).

What is truly alarming is the fact that there is a relationship between the evaluation of educational content and the semester in which the person is studying: the longer the person has spent in the UNICH, the more skeptical it

becomes about the belonging of the educational contents to the intercultural model (Graph 7). At the same time, the satisfaction with the choice of career in the UNICH did not present a distribution of answers so differentiated according to the semester. In summary, what the students question is not so much the educational offer (the contents of the careers), but how much corresponds to the intercultural premise under which the educational offer is supposedly defined.

Here we must remember that the sample for the present survey was not made based on the



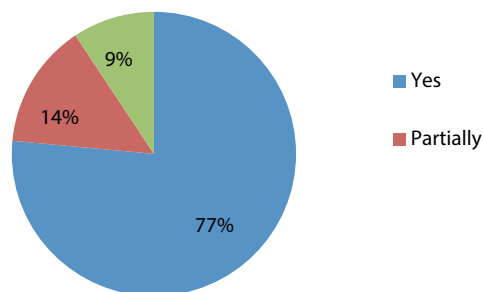


semester in which the person is. Hence, for future studies of this nature, we can see the importance of considering the period of time the person

has spent in the IU, as an aspect that can later be reflected in their greater or lesser satisfaction with the university and its educational contents.

Graph 6. General evaluation of the intercultural model

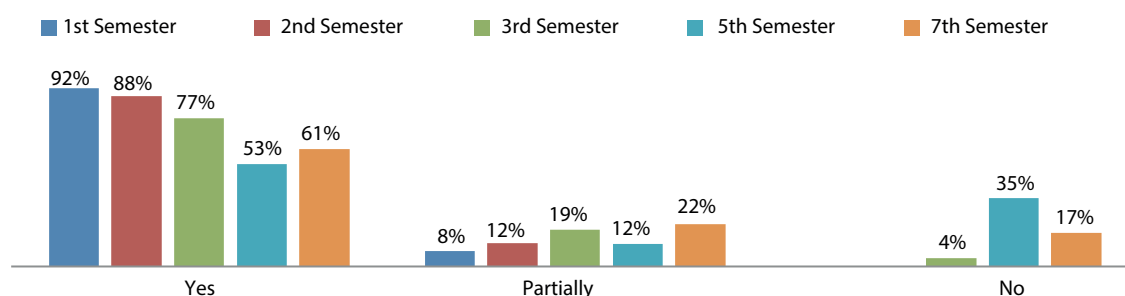
*Do you think that the educational contents of the UNICH comply with the intercultural model? (n = 204)*



Source: self-made

Graph 7. General evaluation of the intercultural model according to the semester

*Do you think that the educational contents of the UNICH comply with the intercultural model? (n = 204)*



Source: self-made

### 3.1. The evaluation of the educational offer and the intercultural model of the UNICH in the ethnolinguistic context

Returning to the three variables-base of the sample, the data will be presented where differences could be observed in the evaluation of the UNICH educational offer according to the mother tongue, sex and career chosen by the person. Before all, it should be noted that no significant differences (greater than 5%) were observed in the responses between men and women, except that a slightly

higher percentage of women (compared to men) plan to continue with postgraduate studies. finish the UNICH. However, there are more pronounced differences if we look at the responses of the students according to the variable “mother tongue”.

For greater operability of this variable, students were grouped into two categories according to their mother tongue: (1) people whose mother tongue is Spanish and (2) those who are native speakers of a language other than Spanish, but own the regional ethnic groups (tsotsil, tseltal, ch'ol, zoque and others). Although the mother tongue<sup>4</sup> is not the only element that determines

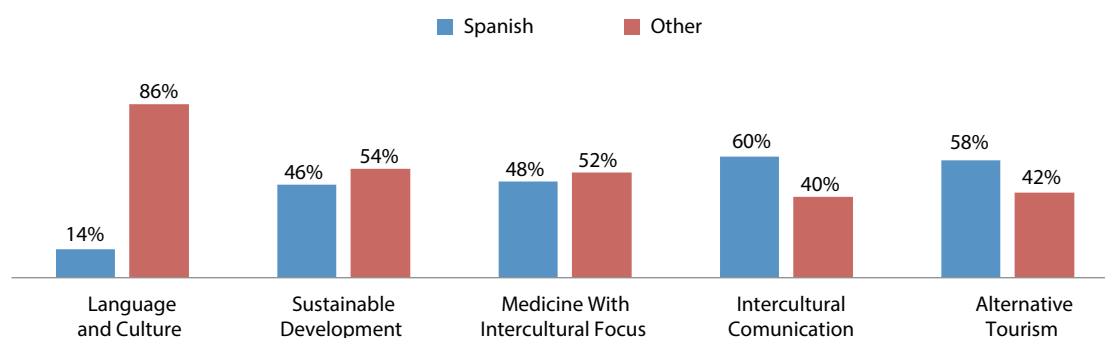


belonging to a sociocultural group and / or an ethnic group, it is one of the backbone of culture as the main system of thought (Fábregas Puig, 2012). Due to the specific nature of the IU, even it could be said that language is precisely one of the main differentiators and structuring among students (Sartorello, 2016, pp. 739-740).

There is an ethnolinguistic segmentation among the five bachelor's degrees taught at the San Cristóbal de Las Casas UNICH office (Figure 8). The most acute case of this segmentation is

the career "Language and culture" which is also the most numerous for the registered students: among the students of this race 86% are speakers of a regional language and the contents of this subject are directly linked to Ethnic demand and cultural diversity. Likewise, in the "Sustainable Development" race, students whose first language is one of the regional languages are slightly prevalent, while in the careers of "Intercultural Communication" and "Alternative Tourism", on the contrary, native speakers of Spanish prevail.

Graph 8. Segmentation of students by the mother tongue according to the races



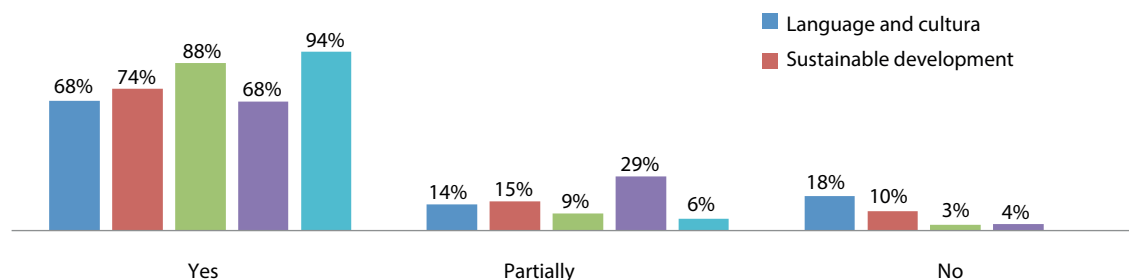
Source: self-made

The striking thing about this segmentation is not only the fact of how students are distributed according to their mother tongue between careers that are focused on cultural claim and community bonding and, on the other

hand, careers that correspond more directly to the demands of the globalization (communication, tourism), but also the evaluation of the intercultural model according to the students of each career.

Graph 9. The general evaluation of the intercultural model according to the career

¿Do you think that the educational contents of the UNICH comply with the intercultural model? (n = 204)



Source: self-made

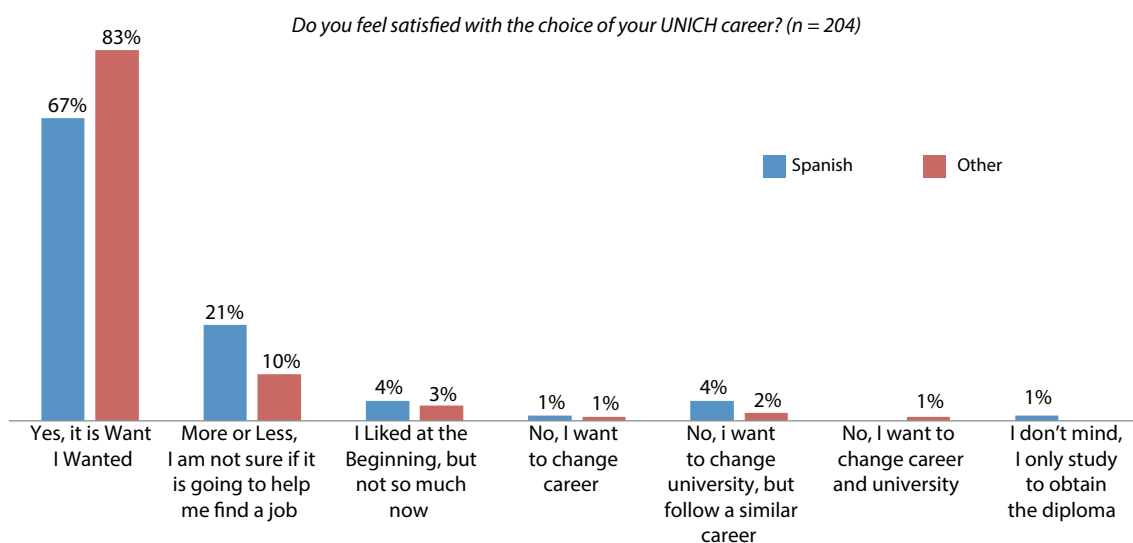


While the students of “Language and culture”, “Sustainable development” and “Intercultural communication” are the most skeptical in stating that the UNICH educational contents correspond to the intercultural model, the highest percentages of negative responses are concentrated within the careers where speakers of regional languages prevail, above all, of “Language and culture” (Graph 9). Curiously, there were no significant differences in this evaluation according to the mother tongue in general within the student population of UNICH. This data leads us to consider that there are likely to be different discourses on interculturality and the didactic materials used among the

different UNICH careers and, probably, a consolidation between them is absent. That is to say, the theoretical, didactic and practical differences of the educational contents of the careers correspond to the intercultural model in a differentiated way and it is something that is reflected in the differences of the opinions of the students.

Students whose native language is Spanish tend to be less satisfied with their choice of career in the UNICH, especially, emphasizing the commercial side of it: a fifth of students feel “more or less” satisfied with the choice of her career at UNICH because she doubts that this will help them find a job (Graph 10).

Graph 10. Satisfaction with the race according to the mother tongue



Source: self-made

Students whose native language is not Spanish are a bit more “optimistic” about their opportunities in the labor market and having studies at the UNICH, although the percentage of “slight doubt” exceeds half of the students in both language groups (Graph 11). At the same time, the expectation about the applicability in everyday life of what was learned in the UNICH is high in both groups and did not present significant differences. This reaffirms the general situation among the student population of the

UNICH: there are not so many doubts about the applicability of what has been learned in the “humanist” or “social” dimension, but this panorama changes speaking of intercultural higher education in mercantile terms, it is say, as something that will raise opportunities in the labor market.

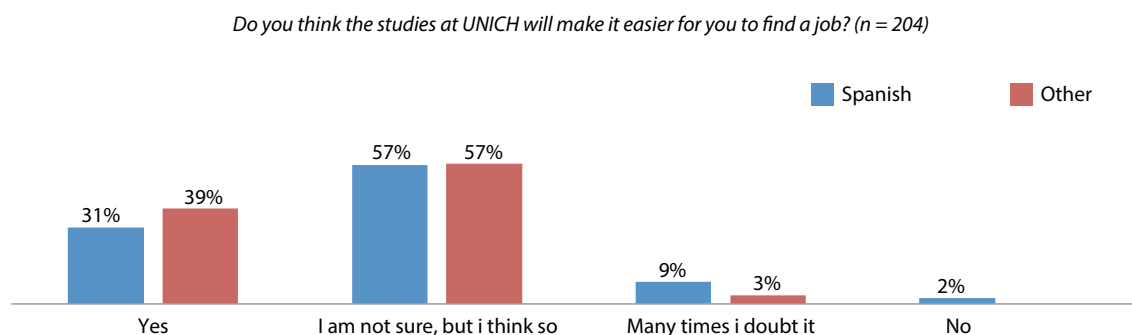
Differences based on the person’s mother tongue are also manifested in the motivation to choose the UNICH. The third part of the students whose mother tongue is not Spanish before



entering this university already wanted to study there, while the fifth part of the other linguistic group followed the advice of someone to go and get to know it (Graph 12). This confirms that the

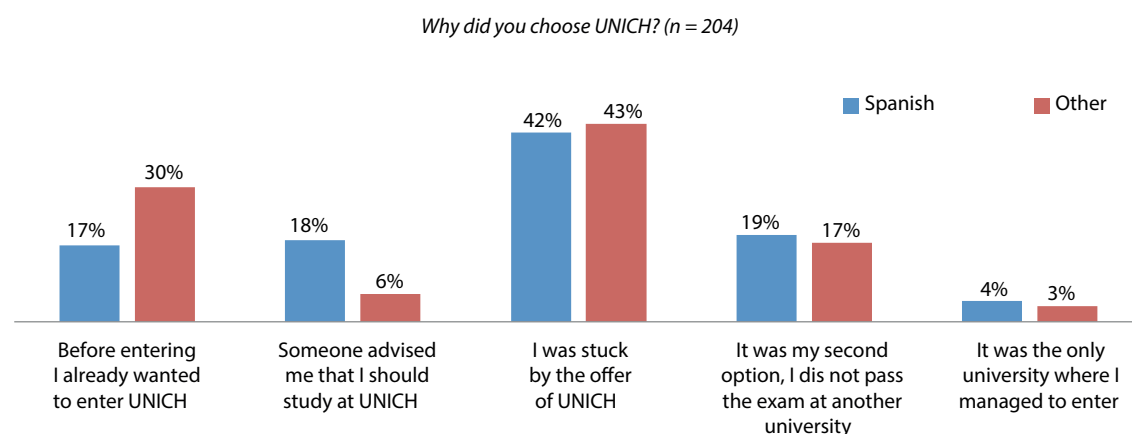
“public relations” of the UNICH and, probably the IU in general, are oriented and / or perceived as oriented towards young people of the ethnic groups.

Graph 11. Evaluation of studies in the context of the labor market according to the mother tongue



Source: self-made

Graph 12. The reasons for choosing UNICH according to the mother tongue



Source: self-made

It should be noted that there is no significant difference according to the mother tongue among the students for whom the UNICH was the second option or the only university where they managed to enter. This fact casts doubt on the fact that UNICH is a university of an explicit priority among students whose native language is one of the regional languages and the “second option” only for the other linguistic group of

students. In other words, regardless of how the future students heard about UNICH, this was the first option<sup>5</sup> for 77% of the Spanish-speaking respondents and 80% of the native speakers of other languages.

Despite the doubts that UNICH students have about their insertion in the labor market, there are no differences based on the mother tongue of the person on the plans they have after



completing their studies: almost three quarters of the students they want to find work that has to do with their careers, while a quarter of the students of both language groups want to continue with their university studies at the graduate level. This was also the only question where slight differences were observed by the sex of the person: while men and women in equal proportions want to find employment when finishing their studies, they are the women who most frequently indicated that they wish to continue with graduate studies.

## 4. Conclusions

Unlike qualitative or *micro-level* approaches, a survey allows you to observe opinions more generally or at the *macro-level*. In the present study, the opinions of the student population of the UNICH were described from a general position and analyzed according to different variables such as the ethnicity, sex and career of the person. Consequently, it was possible to detect the different relationships between these variables and the evaluation of the intercultural model taught at the UNICH, as well as the motivations to study at this university and the satisfaction with the chosen career, among others.

The IU do not try to present themselves as closed and excluding institutions, but rather as presenting an intercultural character: open to all interested persons, although interculturality in these universities is thought and expressed in the curricula and learning strategies from the conceptions of ethnic minorities. This was also shown in the results of the applied survey: students whose mother tongue is not Spanish already wanted to study at UNICH, while a high percentage of students who are native speakers of Spanish followed the advice of knowing this university to make your final choice. Although the IU are presented as universities open to all, they are associated with the indigenous. This entails the danger that interculturality can also be interpreted as a “matter of indigenous people”

and not as something, that should concern the whole society as a whole.

In spite of the general evaluation of the educational contents and the intercultural model taught at the UNICH is positive, there are differences according to the career, while there is an ethnolinguistic segmentation between the careers. This indicates that there may be an insufficient consolidation of intercultural discourse between careers, teachers and academic administration, something that appears as a common problem in the IU. What is alarming in this sense is the fact that a negative evaluation of the intercultural model is more frequent among students in the advanced semesters, so the longer the person spends in college, the more skeptical it becomes. In addition, the students of the races where speakers of the regional languages prevail express greater skepticism about said model. Therefore, it is something that the academic administration should attend, for example, in the form of training courses for teachers and workshops on interculturality and its epistemic and practical application.

Another alarming problem is the level of skepticism that students express about their job placement, counting on their studies at UNICH. This topic should also be addressed by the administration of the university. Possibly students are insufficiently informed about their competencies and opportunities in the labor market. Simultaneously it is of great importance to inform potential employers and society in general about the professional potential of the IU graduates. Of course, this type of campaign would involve more expenses and since the IUs are often faced with economic problems, it would be difficult to solve a problem separately from the other obstacles. At the same time, this highlights the importance of future studies on the career paths of IU graduates to improve the detection of the niche that students of these universities have in the labor market.



Effectively, UNICH and the IUs in general still have a long way to go to get closer to their intercultural goals in a functional way. So changes in the functioning of the IU, as well as in its contents, are necessary, as well as carrying out studies that are not only critical, but also proactive. How efficient and fruitful is the current intercultural turn, is a discussion that we can not solve theoretically, but only observing and living the consequent changes in society, and it is something that can not be observed in the short term. This study is a pioneer in how to approach the evaluation of the IU in Mexico and serves as the starting point and comparison with the other IUs not only in the Mexican territory, but in the rest of Latin America. Comparative studies of this nature would be one of the appropriate ways to create a knowledge base that in the near future can be used to improve the functioning of the IU. If the ethnic minorities that are native to this continent share a disadvantageous situation in the structure of Latin American societies and the IU appear as an element that in this sense can generate structural changes, then better functioning of the IU should be constructed collectively from *the local to the regional and the continental*.

## Notes

1. Basándose en la clásica teoría de Pierre Bourdieu (2001, pp. 131-164) sobre las formas del capital.
2. Por ejemplo, "competencia intercultural", "habilidades de comunicación intercultural" o "sensibilidad intercultural" que pueden realizarse en toma de conciencia, adquisición y aplicación práctica de dichas virtudes en distintas esferas laborales y sociales (Pöhlmann, 2014).
3. Por ejemplo, el supuesto hecho que se mejora la calidad de vida en las comunidades a partir de los proyectos desarrollados en las UI podría ser cuestionado. No cabe duda que los proyectos están orientados hacia el mejoramiento, pero ¿en cuántos casos han sido verdaderamente eficaces y productivos?
4. O el primer idioma.
5. "Fue la única universidad donde logré entrar" significa que la persona ya había intentado pasar el examen de admisión en otras universidades.

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